

# “DE MOKER” GROUP

the rebellious youth in the Dutch  
libertarian movement of the  
roaring twenties

Els van Daele

WORK IS A CRIME

Herman J. Schuurman

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ORIGINAL TITLES  
Werken is misdaad (Herman J. Schuurman, 1924,  
Uitgeverij de Orkaan, Utrecht)

De mokergroep. Hoe de opstandige jeugd in de  
roerige jaren twintig de libertaire beweging in  
beroering bracht (Els van Daele, 2008, Uitgeverij  
de Dolle Hond, Amsterdam)

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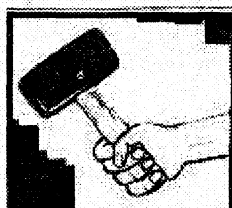


## INTRODUCTION

The story of the “Mokergroep” is definitely one of the more interesting histories about the anarchist movement in the Netherlands. Even though *De Moker* dates back to the twenties, this text is still quite relevant considering our everyday reality. Today, like back then, people seem to get stuck in structures and ways of rebellion that resist and refuse any kind of rupture with the old world. The Moker youth refused to settle for modifying the existing reality, and while trying to destroy it, aimed its arrows not only at the existent, but also at its ever-present defenders.

Their history is one of attacking the suffocation of what was and is presented as ‘life’ with critique, debate, action and agitation, within as well as outside the anarchist movement. Regardless of what was, they chose their own methods and means, without searching for consensus or watering down their words in order to gain allies or applause. Without the illusion that the masses have to be organised, that some kind of formal organisation or union needs to exist in order to reach a revolutionary moment, they individually carved out their own paths towards a break with normality and in this way found each other in a ‘group’ that was not based on membership or ideologies, but on affinity and ideas.

*Amsterdam, 2013*



# DE MOERER

OPRUIEND BLAD VOOR  
JONGE ARBEIDERS

**HAAL OP  
DIE HEI!**



**DE STEUNPILAAAR VAN HET KAPITALISME**

## WORK IS A CRIME

In the usage of language some words and expressions exist that we should abolish, because they give name to certain concepts that form the disastrous and condemning content of the capitalist system.

In the first place there is the word '*work*' and every concept that has something to do with this – workman or worker – worktime – work wages -- work strike – workless – unemployed.

*To work* is the greatest insult and humiliation that humanity gave to itself.

This social system, capitalism, is based on the act of work; it formed a class of people, *that have to work* – and a class of people, that *don't work*. The *workers* are *forced* to work, because if not, they will have to starve. "*Because,*" the owners teach us, "*he who doesn't work, will not eat,*" and they claim that their calculating and gathering of profit is *also work*.

There are workless and unemployed. In the *Van Dale* pocket dictionary I find that *workless* means '*not working*' and *unemployed* means '*without work outside your own fault*'. Workless are the exploiters, that live off the work that the workers perform for them. Unemployed are the workpeople, who are not *allowed* to work, because no profit can be made from them. The owners of the work-tool have determined a time, in which the workers have to work, and they have made workplaces, and they order *what* and *how* the workers have to work. The workers get a specific amount of wages, that enables them to not die from hunger, and only just enables them to take care of



their children in the first few years. After that, the children have learned enough in school to be able to work too. The owners let their children learn as much as they need in order to know how to command the workers also.

Work is the greatest doom. Working makes mindless and soulless.

In order to have someone work for you, you have to possess a lack of character, and in order to work you *also* have to possess a lack of character; you have to crawl and swindle, betray, cheat and fake.

For the rich unemployed, work (of the workers) is their means of getting themselves an easy life. For the workers it is a miserable burden, as some kind of ill-fated destiny they received at birth, that prevents the workers from living a reasonable life.

*Only when we will not work again, life will start.*

Work is the arch-enemy of life. The good worker is a work animal with workclaws and a numb lifeless expression on the face.

When a human becomes conscious of life, he will never work again.

*I am not stating* that anyone should just walk away from his boss tomorrow, and has to see if he'll manage to survive without work, and then can be convinced that he is ready for life. If someone is without work because there's no other option, this is bad enough in itself; but not working now usually turns into parasiting on those comrades who do work. If you are able to survive through – as the decent people call it – robbing and stealing, without

being exploited by a boss, good – do it; but do not believe, that this solves the big problem. Working is a social evil. This society is life's arch-enemy and only through the destruction of the current and future communities of work animals – i.e. through revolution after revolution – work will disappear.

First, Life will come – the full, rich life – and then everyone will be brought to *create*, because of their pure drift of life. Then every human being will be a creator because of inner impulses, and will create only *the beautiful and the good, which is the necessary*. Subsequently there won't be a *workman* or worker anymore; everyone will be a human, and from human necessity of life, from inner need, he will inexhaustibly create that which fullfills these life necessities under reasonable relations. There won't be a work-time and work-place, neither workless nor unemployed. There will only be Life – great pure cosmic life, and the drift to create will be human's biggest life joy, not forced and bounded because of hunger, wages, time and place, and not exploited by parasites.

Creating is the intense joy of life, working is the intense suffering of life.

Under these criminal social relations creating is impossible.

*All work is a crime.*

The act of working is to assist making profit and exploiting; to assist falsification, betrayal, poisoning; to assist preparation of war; to assist the killing of the whole of humankind.

*Work is life destroying.*

When we *understand this very well*, our life will get a completely different meaning. If we, in ourselves, feel the living drift of creation, this will express itself through the destruction of this system of criminality and lack of character. And when we are forced to work in order not to starve, we should take care that this working contributes to the downfall of capitalism.

**If we are not working towards the destruction of capital, we are working towards the destruction of humanity!**

THAT IS WHY we will CONSCIOUSLY sabotage *every* capitalist enterprise, we will be a burden to each and every boss. Where we, rebellious youth, *have to* work, materials, machines and products *have to* be made unusable. Again and again the gears will jump out of the wheels, the pieces will fly from knives and chisels, the tools most necessary will be nowhere to find – we will tell each other recipes and means.

**We do not want to be destroyed by capitalism, so capitalism will have to be destroyed by us.**

We want to create as free people, not work as slaves; therefore we will destroy the system of slavery. Capitalism only exists because of the work of the workers, *thus* we don't want to be workers and will sabotage the work.

*Herman J. Schuurman, 1924*

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## THE YOUTH START TO REVOLT

Herman J. Schuurman (1897-1991), the author of *Work is a crime*, was one of the founders of the group “De Moker”, a group of young proletarians who were eager for revolution and gathered around the magazine *De Moker*<sup>1</sup>, with the subtitle *Opruiend blad voor jonge arbeiders* (Magazine of agitation for young workers). For more than four years, from the end of 1923 until the summer of 1928, they tried to shake up the, in their eyes, too indolent libertarian and workers’ movement:

“It can, so *it has to*, sound like a blow from a club hammer to their ears: we, the youth, refuse to stand behind the dirty, disgusting tricks of the old people in the *movement* any longer [...] Everyone should know that in this society we are without authority, without religion, without money and preferably without work, and that we are also not in favour of this ethical, religious fuss. The annoying, repetitive complaints for years on end, considering the *right to work*, we are changing into the *right to laziness*,<sup>2</sup> because these are the first symptoms of destruction. Destruction! Bakunin, also when he was old, was a revolutionary, which is why he pointed out the way of destruction.<sup>3</sup> Did the situation of the plebs improve? No! A thousand times no! The organisations, political as well as the unions, have left the foundations of the system untouched. They

only wanted to change the excesses, and even in this they failed completely. [...] Work has constantly been the battle cry of the bourgeoisie, but also of the leaders of political parties and unions. Nowadays - which is why history keeps repeating itself without the proletariat becoming any wiser - it's even real anarchists that cheer in their organs<sup>4</sup> because there are more jobs available in Belgium. That's why we are not trying to establish *one* organisation, we don't know a unified revolutionary front, we recognise and provoke solidarity in the factory and workplace to stimulate sabotage. We find places for agitation everywhere.." <sup>5</sup>

One of the young libertarians clarified this later:

"Those Moker- and Alarm groups didn't exist in order to exist as groups, but were made up from some people that felt the need to do something about the slacking off of the older people in those older organisations, to fight against it and to attack it."<sup>6</sup>

*Alarm*, founded in 1922 and closely related to *De Moker*, had already published an article against work, that referred to Lafargue as well:

"Capitalism, which gets its lifeblood from labour and profits from its surplus, will be doomed to its downfall as soon as this labour, and therefore the profit, is lacking. Paul Lafargue, the author of *The Right to be Lazy*,

says that working in this society is a disgrace. Therefore it would have been more radical to at least call his book “The Duty to be Lazy”. It is the *duty* of revolutionaries to deny capitalism its lifeblood. Which is exactly why the union is counter-revolutionary, because instead of propagating disobedient *laziness* and sabotage, it propagates the right to *work*, and makes the workers believe that through working some advantages can still be gained. [...] However, the union exists thanks to *wage-slavery*: if wage-slavery collapses, the union will also collapse. Hence it was clear that the union, existing because of and thanks to capitalism, had no other choice but to contribute to its construction, while in the wage struggle, the workers were constantly dissuaded from overthrowing capitalism. As anarchists we should not only fight against capitalism, but also against the enemy among us: against the unions. Because capitalism and the union have one common enemy: laziness. And there where the capitalists and leaders are preaching *the duty and the right to work* over and over again, the revolutionaries have to propagate everywhere *the duty and the right to laziness*.<sup>7</sup>

Different to the group around *Alarm*, even though generally they were not much older, the group around *De Moker* explicitly defined itself as a youth group. As Schuurman writes: “We youths have too much right to life, too much passion, too much courage, too much faith and trust in ourselves, too much will and nerve,

to just be kicked into a forgotten corner.”<sup>8</sup> This didn’t change the fact that *Alarm*, contrary to more or less the whole libertarian and workers press, reacted enthusiastically about the appearance of *De Moker*:

“*De Moker*, organ of agitation of the youth, is very refreshing. Published ‘only to propagate sabotage’. Just like *Alarm* it struggles against any kind of wage system, because the workers don’t understand that ‘as long as the wage system exists, exploitation is a fact’. The organ therefore struggles against the unions, because the unions ‘willingly offer their services to keep the workers quiet’. Already eight of these anti-union youths have appeared in front of the justice system for agitation and being a threat to the state. The magazine therefore seems promising. The young generation has to hate the wage system, has to become work-shy: this will be the downfall of the bourgeoisie.”<sup>9</sup>

Initially, when the group was founded, most members were between 17-23 years old – Schuurman was relatively old within the group. The founders of the group as well as the people who worked on the magazine all came from the most radical parts of the youth emancipation movement, which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century together with industrialization. Industrialization in the Netherlands began relatively late, nonetheless its disastrous consequences – especially for the youth – didn’t decrease, which explains the strong anti-capitalist tendency in this movement. Sometimes as early as at the age of twelve, these youths were



confronted with the swords of the cops or the guns of the army because of the slightest expression of dissatisfaction in the street: hence they understood quite quickly which class was being defended in the Netherlands. Moreover, they would be the ones who had to form the infantry of the army, as the rich only had to pay a tax in order to escape military service, which certainly contributed to a strong anti-militarist tendency. On this fertile ground, in 1904 in Amsterdam the International Anti-militarist Association (IAMV)<sup>10</sup> was founded, for which Domela Nieuwenhuis, 'grandfather' of the Dutch socialist and libertarian movement, was the inspiration. Representatives from England, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland and France participated in the founding conference, but the Dutch branch was the only one that was successfully established. With the slogans 'No man, no cent for the army!' and 'War on the war!' which were systematically accompanied by the anti-colonial call 'Indonesia free from Holland!'<sup>11</sup>, it functioned for many years, until the Second World War, as a bonding tool for the different libertarian and anti-militarist groups who met each other during its conferences and meetings, took part in its campaigns and spread together its magazine *De Wapens Neder* (Down with the weapons).

When the First World War neared its end, the revolutionary wave that submerged the old world also reached our flat, so-called neutral<sup>12</sup> country: there were riots against the high cost of living and scarcity (the most famous of these being the 'potato riots'), numerous proletarian demonstrations, strikes, and even a

mutiny in the barracks. Amongst the young proletarians who started to revolt against the 'inertia' of the existing organizations and gathered in the Social-Anarchist Youth Organisations (SAJO)<sup>13</sup>, a group of five tried to blow up the Amsterdam Stock Exchange as well as an explosives depot located at the edge of the city – both attempts, due to bad luck, were unsuccessful. In the meetings and publications of this group of social-anarchist youth the discussions, mainly about the practices of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', were combined with topics considering principles and the role of parties and unions in the revolutionary struggle in general. Around 1919-1920 the anti-Bolshevist tendency among the social-anarchist youth, that actually rejected every kind of representative organization, started to prevail over all the others, mainly because the others joined various 'adult' groups from the communists to the syndicalists. In 1922 this radical current gathered around the monthly magazine *Alarm*, following the example of *Nabat* from revolutionary Ukraine<sup>14</sup>, and/or joined the group around *De Moker* at a later date. The majority of the future participants of *De Moker*, such as Herman Schuurman, had been members of the anti-alcoholism youth group (JGOB)<sup>15</sup>, sometimes before joining the SAJO. The great importance that was given to anti-alcoholism in the socialist and libertarian movement was quite typical for the Dutch movement ("A drinking worker doesn't think, a thinking worker doesn't drink" as the well-known slogan of Domela Nieuwenhuis goes). The fact that this anti-alcoholism was such a success among the rebellious youth of that time certainly has to do with the Calvinism by which

the Dutch population is so deeply influenced, but definitely also with the fact that a lot of these youths knew the havoc that alcoholism could cause from experiences in their own environments, in their own families. For them anti-alcoholism meant the emancipation of personality as well as fighting against the existing social relations; in their eyes, it was a necessary condition for any social change. The same debates that shook up the social-anarchist youth also took place within the JGOB, and whilst some members joined the communists, Herman Schuurman and his comrades organized a conference at the end of 1920 during which the Free Youth League (VJV)<sup>16</sup> was founded, with the following *Declaration of Principles*:

“The Free Youth League is the national co-operation of youths who, realizing that they should not and cannot passively accept life-destroying conditions, each one in their own way and as much as possible together work on the psychological and social revolution. Where our society, revealing itself in capitalism and consequently militarism, is only being maintained through the destruction of the free human personality, the VJV chooses to stand for ‘the free human personality’. In order to improve the development of the free human personality, the VJV accepts all means to destroy the aspects that could hinder it, such as capitalism, militarism, school and religion.”

Amongst other things for the VJV, Herman Schuurman wrote the furious pamphlet *De Moord* (The Murder), in which he held the last generation as a whole

responsible for the slaughter of 1914-1918 and for the continuous, appalling conditions:

“We are young and we want to live. Do you understand, reader [i.e. the supposed passive reader], murderer! WE WANT TO LIVE! Reader, you tolerate all that is inhuman; reader, you are collaborating with this society like a spineless sheep, reader you are tolerating it.. [...] You don't want to know it, but we, the youth, we will throw it in your face in such a way that you will have to realise it.. [...] Ten million deaths, is that murder or what? HUMAN! Reader you are tolerating it.. [...] The oil-, steel-, and transport magnates have earned fortunes. [...] Reader, you are tolerating it. You have paid this blood money as well. [...] This society is our ethical and physical downfall, because you tolerate it, because you work, you collaborate with increasing the weight of the block that squeezes us to death.”

With the absoluteness of youthful innocence and audacity it was condemned:

“We do not tolerate. We want the revolution! As we don't want to be destroyed by this society, this society will have to be destroyed by us. Reader, as we don't want to be destroyed due to your criminal tolerance, you will have to be destroyed by us. WE ARE THE JUDGEMENT. We are the Life. We are the Renewal. We are the Revision. WE ARE THE REVOLUTION!”<sup>17</sup>

We see this reasoning, edited and formulated in a more nuanced way, return in the pamphlet *Work is a crime* that was published three years later.

When the young Herman Groenendaal, who also left the JGOB to join the VJV and who was in prison for refusing military service, started a hunger strike in June 1921, the IAMV launched a solidarity campaign. This campaign turned into a huge anti-militarist movement: for several months demonstrations, protest meetings and strikes took place in which thousands of workers participated, and some others who had also refused military service followed Groenendaal's example and started hunger strikes as well. When at the beginning of November the movement began to stagnate, a group of activists placed a bomb at the facade of the house owned by one of the judges who had sentenced Groenendaal, the purpose being to criticize the 'passivity' of those who were fundamentally non-violent (which Groenendaal actually was as well). One of the perpetrators of the attack stated later on:

"People were surprised that none of us three held a resounding speech in front of the court, in the style that was common to the older social-democrats in Wilhelmit Germany, and that we didn't have sympathizers defending us. They are wrong. The *deed* was our propaganda. We have *done* what we had to say. We have said this to the bourgeoisie *and* to the proletariat. And what we will have to say in the future will be more of the same, expressed in a slightly different way: seizing of the workplaces, trade

organisations. [...] What we primarily wanted to say with our attack was: look here, proletarians, you are lost in admiration of the non-violent Groenendaal, so wake up and think about this bomb-attack for a while...”<sup>18</sup>

Obviously the attack caused a lot of conflicts. Few people appreciated this type of critique. Those who approved of the act and organised a campaign to support the perpetrators – who were convicted with heavy sentences – soon after formed the groups around *Alarm* and a bit later *De Moker*. Both groups were closely related, just like the SAJO and the VJV which they originated from. *De Moker* even took over the manifesto of the VJV.<sup>19</sup>

The outspoken anti-militarism of *De Moker* and *Alarm* systematically distinguished itself from a certain kind of libertarian-pacifist, ethical anti-militarism heavily influenced by Tolstoy, the kind of fundamental ‘non-violence’ that still proliferates in every protest movement, to frustrate and suffocate it. The critique on militarism developed by *De Moker* was more deep and concrete. In a polemic against a manifesto that appeared in the Bolshevik *Kommunist*, calling out to the youth to “learn how to handle weapons”, Jo de Haas describes how the army and militarism are intertwined with the state and capitalism:

“Such jokers. Because, they say, the war can only be ended permanently through the *world revolution*. And for these Marxists *revolution is - a battle!* Anyone can understand the absurd

consequences of this. Capitalism invented measures that can turn a city like London into a graveyard in twenty-four hours. The 'proletarian army' therefore will have to possess gases, bacteria, etc. that could, for example, turn London *into a graveyard in ten hours!* If not, the battle – the 'revolution', according to them – will be lost before it has begun. [...] School-children, who won't start a fight without a stick that is at least a decimetre longer than those of the others, already understand this. [...] However, the youth needs to understand *this*: the social-democrats aim for the conquest of state power. In the mentioned manifest we read: "When capitalism is being destroyed and the workers take state power and production into their own hands everywhere, the war becomes impossible." *This is the deception! The workers don't take the state power into their hands. The leaders do!!* Which changes a lot and explains everything. [...] At the head of the *red* army in Russia are *white* generals who, *just like here*, open fire on strikers and disperse demonstrations of women. Just imagine, if these soldiers couldn't shoot..."<sup>20</sup>

## CRITIQUE WITH CLUBHAMMER BLOWS

Herman Schuurman was definitely a key figure – both within the group as well as concerning *De Moker* magazine – at least in the first years during which he was editor of the magazine, in which he published a lot of his own articles and translations from German and for which he usually made the cover.<sup>21</sup> Under the title *Aantekeningen van een jongen* (Notes from a boy) he regularly commented upon foreign current affairs, thus sharing his conclusions with his comrades in the Netherlands.

For example, in *De Moker* of 10<sup>th</sup> February 1924:

“In England the social-democrats have gained power. Thanks to a forced government crisis, the dissolution of the House of Commons and the elections, they have gained a great amount of seats in the government. [...] The blessings that the leaders of the Second International gave to German and Austrian workers will now also be enjoyed by the English ones. The subservience of the social-democrats to the great capitalism [...] will now be executed in an even more attractive version by the English ‘socialist’ ministers who, just like all their predecessors, are the crawling, submissive servants of the big English-Dutch petroleum cartel Royal Dutch Shell Co. [...] In the Netherlands the gentlemen wanted to play the same little game. At the time of the government crisis



Troelstra declared that the SDAP<sup>22</sup> wanted to take over government leadership. [...] It didn't work out. [...] The traitors of the workers want to be in the government so badly. Because then they would be safe. [...] The leaders of the workers are the worst enemies of humanity, because they can fulfil their own desire for power only as long as the workers continue to be slaves."

In *De Moker* of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1925:

"The Russian diplomatic consultant in Rome has offered a banquet to Mussolini, while his colleague in Berlin received a visit from the nuncio Pacelli, the representative of the Pope. In London Rakovski [a Russian diplomat] made a toast to the English King. And Krassin [another Russian diplomat] arrived in Paris this week, and all this takes place in the settings of the old Machiavellian traditions of diplomacy. With a capitalist craftiness the Russian despots know how to play the interests of the different states against each other and the people, and the workers are its victims. [...] The 19th of December will be a year since the slaughtering of the defenceless political prisoners in the Bolshevik hell *Solovetsky* Island in the White Sea. All over the world, that day will be engraved on the souls of those who love human freedom. And they will know that they have to destroy every possible government until there is nothing left of it."

In *De Moker* of 15<sup>th</sup> October 1926, at the time of the big miners' strike in England:

“Finally! Finally there is news from England that gives hope, that shows that the miners over there are no longer willing to let themselves be confused by speeches and conferences, and that they want to start putting this method into practice, which after all is the only one that can break the capitalists, that's to say sabotage. [...] Now that the decision is finally made, to no longer maintain the mines [with the risk of explosions, floods etc.] the outcries of all the different 'leaders of the workers' can be heard everywhere. [...] *The leaders*, who after a year of correspondence and conferences with the government and mine owners knew that they were ready for this strike and that, no matter how long it would take, they would persist until the workers would be sacrificed; *The leaders*, who preached for peace and order and made possible the continuous well functioning of the transportation of food and coal; *The leaders*, who made sure that during the months of strikes, the mines – the property, the power of the enemies of the workers – were taken care of by 'safety men', so the exploitation could continue immediately after the final day [of strike]; *Those leaders* are complaining, now that the workers *finally* (after thousands have already given up all hope) start to speak about flooding the mines. This is, from a revolutionary perspective, the *only* right method. *If the workers cannot occupy the mines, they have to*

*be destroyed.* Also in the Netherlands there is the threat of a miners' strike. [...] Which will turn out to be, as long as the leaders keep the power in their hands, the same story of treason and torture as in England today, like in Twente two years ago with the textile workers. Comrades, let's make sure that, in case of action, this will be of revolutionary scale. Let's make sure that the workers finally become averse to the long-term-strikes. *Propagate the occupation of the workplaces; if this is not possible, then sabotage!*"

During the second year Herman Schuurman disappeared from the editorial committee (which became anonymous), but continued working on *De Moker* until 1927, when he got involved mainly with the international campaign in defence of Sacco and Vanzetti. Shortly after, he withdrew from the movement.<sup>23</sup> With *Work is a crime* he perfectly summarized what the Moker youth tried to put into practice; their programme. According to oral tradition the group was made up out of more or less five hundred boys and girls (not as many girls as boys though), scattered all through the country, but mostly in the North and West. There were no leaders, but the editorial committee of *De Moker* determined its content. Lists of refused articles were regularly published, with short comments such as "inadequate, letter will follow", "very vague, try to focus on one point", "too long", "written too badly", "contradictory", etc. During the quarterly general meetings the editorial committee was evaluated and at times new editors were appointed. The group also

didn't have registered members: all one had to do was to contribute to *De Moker* in one way or another. In "A short report of the quarterly Moker meeting on 10th April 1927" one can read: "Compared with a few years ago we can see that national contact has improved, that the youths from different parts of the country are no longer strangers to one another. We also have international contacts now. We have an independent magazine, in which we can propagate our opinion. A magazine [...] filled with clever and vigorous articles written by the youth itself and distributed by the youth, therefore a magazine that expresses a beautiful piece of struggle."<sup>24</sup> For a lot of participants their contribution to *De Moker* essentially consisted of distributing the three- to four thousand monthly copies, which often caused confrontations with political opponents and especially with the cops, and therefore arrests, while the magazine itself was confiscated on a regular basis and its editors were inflicted with heavy sentences several times. However, the Mokers regarded this repression as propaganda for their cause. After a series of confiscations, arrests of peddlers all the way in Antwerp, Belgium, a two month prison sentence for one of the editors for agitation in regards to draft dodging, and after the police started shooting during a small disturbance in Amsterdam, *De Moker* could state:

"And so our *Moker* became the magazine the owners and masters find themselves most threatened by, because we agitate the youths to be human, who the rulers wish to turn into their soulless slaves and unscrupulous

executioners. Because we make the youth conscious of the fact that capitalism exists because of their labour and they should therefore refuse them their work force. [...] That's why those in power send their bloodhounds after us. In our great struggle for the humanization of humanity we find the owners and masters in front of us, merciless."<sup>25</sup>

In this article like in many others, the ideas of Bakunin can be seen, especially those put forward in *God and the State*, his most known and widely published text in the Netherlands in which he speaks about the emancipation of humanity faced with religious prostration – to which he attributes the origin of the animality of the human being – and the ‘task’ of the human to become more and more human by abolishing God and the State in one fluent movement. For the youth around *De Moker*, freedom was the essence of life. Their opponents in the movement often criticized their ‘extreme subjectivity’, their risky behaviour or their ‘desire for martyrdom’, while forgetting that daily life was (and is) experienced as ‘torture’ by the majority of the workers – and not just by those who consider work to be a crime. This, however, does not mean that the Mokers did not do anything to fight against the inevitable repression. For example, as a means of support for and protection of draft dodgers, they proposed: “Like in Amsterdam, where the whole neighbourhood starts to revolt when a worker’s house is stolen from him, *the neighbourhood should also revolt when a draft dodger is being picked up from his house by the police.* And when they try to arrest him at work, the comrades should show their

solidarity and stop work immediately.”<sup>26</sup> In *De Moker*, the wildest ones were sometimes urged to be a bit more careful with respect to law enforcement; some texts suggest that there were discussions about using guerilla tactics. In the beginning of 1926, after a failed attempt of merging with the more moderate aspects of the VJV, the editorial committee took the collective name of “Teun the Demolisher, traveler in dynamite and crowbars”<sup>27</sup> while the articles would from then on only be signed with initials or made-up names such as “Rebel”, “Someone”, or “Brat”. This also shows the relatively impenetrable structure of the Moker group. The members of the different groups knew each other well, visited each other at their houses, shared everything, and operated as a close gang of friends, which formed a barrier against little free riders who wanted to give themselves a revolutionary look by associating with their comrades, but also against police infiltration.

It is clear that the methods of the young Mokers were primarily provocative. The same goes for their customs, however strict they might seem to us now. Boys and girls hung around with each other freely; they went swimming naked, didn't drink and most of them were vegetarians; smoking was seen as something bad, just like 'debauchery'. They had good relations with the German vagabond movement and some of them traveled all over Europe; they also refused, on the same level of the 'church and bars', the first spectacular pleasures that the rise of the society of the spectacle brought with it: football and cinema. One of the editors explained their opinion as follows:

“The damaging effects of alcohol on the human body are well known. Alcohol however is not a cause, but just a consequence of all this misery. Just see how Jenever<sup>28</sup> is currently being replaced by ‘sports’. How, while nowadays more and more of the working class is preoccupied by the question of sobriety, feelings are expressed through shouting and screaming around the football fields. And it will continue to be like this. Again and again new ways of poisoning will be invented, because they are necessary for maintaining the passivity of the working class. And that will continue as long as you continue to fight against the consequences instead of the cause. [...] O, we would like to scream at those rookies, “stop your bawling about alcoholism”. Don’t fight against excesses, but attack the cause. Come and ‘moker’ with us.”<sup>29</sup>

Some of them were so much ‘anti-system’ that they even refused the welfare money they were ‘entitled’ to. While in order to survive most of them had to work, obviously, they usually worked temporary jobs, without giving much importance to their livelihood. Furthermore they lived off the fruits of the field or went out for dinner without paying; they earned their living “singing and stealing”, like the self-righteous bourgeoisie criticised them: “we have banished the false ethics of capitalism, the respect for property. *Take what you need and expropriate the owners* are for us reasonable and ethical life principles.”<sup>30</sup> Considering sabotage, which they propagated so heavily, not very many

traces or testimonies are left behind, with the exception of a few larger scale actions. An old Moker would much later recount the time when they sabotaged the electricity network of Amsterdam: "The electrical source was in Weesp. There we threw a metal wire over the combination cables, which caused an electrical breakdown. No more light and the factories couldn't function anymore."<sup>31</sup> In *De Moker* of 1<sup>st</sup> July 1924 the explosion of a gunpowder depot in Muiden and the burning down of an artillery shed in Spaarndam and a building of the civil guards in Overveen are praised. Some time later, when "in and around Santpoort<sup>32</sup> twelve of our comrades were taken out of their beds by the cops in the early morning", in connection with the arsons, *De Moker* reacted by turning around the accusation: "... or are we dealing with dissatisfaction amongst soldiers, like amongst the marines? Or is it a provocation from the cops?..." and by denouncing the brutal violence that took place during the interrogations and arrests (those arrested had to be released again the next day) to finish with the conclusion: "...we don't know, what we do know is that the police and the press have made beautiful propaganda for *the idea of practical disarmament*."<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the use of explosives was rare in the Netherlands.

As written in their manifesto, the school system was one of their targets. "All schools should be set on fire" Jacob Knap writes in *De Moker*: "School education turns children into weak, washed-out people, who lack self-awareness and become so used to orders they can't see the humiliation of it any more. [...]"



Emancipation will be achieved when the proletarians chase away their leaders and start acting for themselves.”<sup>34</sup> However, the members of the Moker group were not merely activists; generally speaking they were eager for knowledge. Those who had enjoyed some kind of education – usually teachers who couldn’t find work because of their criminal record or who didn’t want to work in the school system on principle – helped the others. They read the ‘classics’, that is, the very little that was available in Dutch or, for some, in German. They made music, organised language courses (in Esperanto, for example), courses in drawing and other graphic techniques, and attached a lot of importance to the layout of their publications. They also organised conferences and debates that attracted quite a large number of people, and that were often quite heated. Together with *De Moker* they also distributed *Alarm* and other libertarian magazines, and dozens of brochures and books about the workers’ movement, anarchism and anti-militarism. Besides the quarterly held conferences, every year during the Whitsun weekend they organised, together with the other VJV groups, anti-capitalist, anarchist and mainly anti-militarist ‘mobilisations’ to which they wanted to give an international character. *De Moker* of 10<sup>th</sup> July 1926 gives an account of “the third international Whitsun-mobilisation of the anti-militarist youth” in Soest: police and army ready, customs trying to stop foreign visitors entering. Apart from the three hundred Dutch people, two hundred came from Germany, and smaller numbers from Belgium, Switzerland, England, Austria and France. “In France they are protesting against the war in Morocco

and Syria as much as they can. Making propaganda is very difficult over there, putting up posters can get you a jail sentence of six, eight, or more months. Refusing military service is practically impossible in France. Those who refuse will be punished with a five year jail sentence each time until they've reached the age of forty-eight." (Still today in the Netherlands, like elsewhere, the 'acquired rights' gained though tough struggles are being abolished at a rapid speed. However, the local oppressors can boast about their leniency through comparison with their colleagues in neighbouring countries.)

Klaas Blauw expressed, a few months before his sudden death, the frustrations and motives of these revolutionary youths (without revolution) in the most bitter and irreconcilable way:

"By not doing we will be ruined, morally, mentally, physically. Also by doing wrong. Almost everything that is called work *nowadays*, destroys our bodies. Factory labour is the worst. Working ruins the bones, makes the muscles shrivel, numbs the nerves. Or stimulates them to an unnatural growth, soon followed by their deterioration. The brain has neither time nor power to function and won't be able to start developing at a later stage. People poison their bodies with bad food, produced by themselves, poison their minds with words and thoughts that they swallow in order to accept their existence. When that's not enough, there's alcohol, morphine, football, cinema and women

in order to forget about their misery in their carefree escapism, while religion is to dream about future bliss. *This* is how humanity is destroying itself. And we? We want a body that lives as long as possible, health and muscular strength, brains that think; we want to create and enjoy, enjoy *our* lives and *all* life that exists and that we will create, and enjoy creating it. Our life has to be full and rich. Therefore we can't work in this world that only wants to profit off us. With every act of work we are destroying ourselves. We think and can not turn our thoughts into reality. We dream beautiful things, but society doesn't allow us to express them and turn them into something tangible. To us, the whole world that forces us into inertia is disgusting. *We want, we can, but we are not allowed!* The state ties us up with a web of laws, regulations and rules, written and unwritten. And if we can't control our craving for satisfaction, if we want to be free and *act* – we can, as they call it, give rein to our 'youthful foolishness' on the grey prison walls, like numbered criminals. In our hearts a fierce hate burns against this society, that makes *this* out of us, that forces us to violate ourselves by working, or succumbing, by doing nothing. But we will stand up and we will *not* succumb. We use our force, *we will SWEAT and TOIL*. But *our only work* will be destroying this murderous organisation of profit, called capitalist society. It is the only work that suits us *now*, because through it we will liberate the earth. She is not sufficient for us, we have to be able

to create the new, that cannot congeal itself like the old, but that has to be alive and moving. But first.. we can't do anything else now and we are not allowed to. *Watch your back*, capitalist, big, small, full or half, *worker watch your back*, if you are against us and fight for your boss or aim yourself for power. Watch your back, because you will join the same death-dance. We will break down your state into pieces – and your head along with it. For you are the enemy of life. As long as you don't struggle with us.”<sup>35</sup>

## THE STRIKE IN THE PEAT BOGS

In the spring of 1925 a huge wild cat strike broke out in the north of the Netherlands. In the year before that, the authorities of Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe<sup>36</sup> decided to fight against the increasing unemployment and ‘begging’ with a joint project that they called “assistance with employment”. It considered reforestation, impoldering, channelling, and other comparable forms of forced labour. In the huge peat bogs – an industry that was declining rapidly in those years – life circumstances were of equally disgraceful misery, and many had to work there through the “assistance with employment” program for part of the year. In the first months of 1925 small strikes and acts of sabotage spread from village to village; this led to a rebellious movement that started to take on disturbing proportions for the owners...

In this region the ‘free socialism’ initiated by Domela Nieuwenhuis was deeply established, as opposed to syndicalism: it was carried by the ‘free groups’, small informal groups of like-minded people coordinated by the IAMV. In their villages these groups organised manifestations, readings, concerts, theatre plays, conferences and debates etc. where people like Anton Constandse and Jo de Haas found interested listeners. The free groups also founded libraries and mobile bookshops, and distributed *De Moker* as well as *De Kreet der Jongeren*, *De Branding*, *De Wapens Neder* and *Alarm*. In several villages groups came into existence that called themselves ‘Mokers’ (though unfortunately

there aren't many traces of these left). The peat bogs in Drenthe developed a certain reputation during the big offensive strike in 1921 when hundreds of peat bog workers went cycling through the country together, until Twente, to convince the factory workers in the textile industry of a united struggle without compromise. (The peat bog workers were received with open arms, but nothing more. According to one of the participants, "Some workers were up for it, but the majority were not."<sup>37</sup>) The split between communists and libertarians took place during this strike, after news about the massacre in Cronstadt, but also due to strategic reasons. "In our opinion the strike was very clearly directed against the system", said Harmen van Houten. Houten also spoke about the influence of Anton Constandse, who stayed in his house often and who during meetings would criticize any form of negotiation with the owners, and about how the free socialists obviously continued to participate in the strike, "but no longer with the slogan *pay raise*; they wanted *socialism now*." After ten demanding weeks, when all attempts to expand the movement failed and the repression increased, the strike was exhausted. But the libertarians had obtained a certain reputation: their number increased and the free groups thrived.

"But all those new faces, that wasn't the only thing. A new wind started to blow. I think this happened because we started to get out of our isolated situation. A lot of anarchist youth from Amsterdam, The Hague and that region came here, curious about this rebellious

Drenthe. Comrades really, young guys and girls with the slogan ‘Work is a crime’. Work is a crime? It must have been incomprehensible for us. We worked, we had to work in order to eat, and we had been doing this since the age of ten. [...] As comrades they came by train or bicycle and assumed they could just join the table when we were having dinner. We were hospitable enough, wanted to welcome them as comrades. But they were shameless enough to just sit down in the easy chair of our mother or our father. At first proud of their friendship, it didn’t take long until we’d rather see them leaving instead of arriving. This was made clear to them quite quickly. First we were a bit surprised and didn’t really know what to do with the situation. Fortunately not all of them were like this, these people from the big city. But it was definitively strange.”

Harmen van Houten doesn’t mention much more about this; he wasn’t a Moker himself but observed some kind of cultural clash between the North and West of the country that definitely also existed within the Moker group and within the VJV. “You know, Derk, what the biggest burden is for these people from Friesland and maybe also Drenthe and Groningen?” a young member of the VJV from Friesland wrote to a comrade from Groningen, “That in their daily life they constantly speak their dialect or own language. They think in Fries, Drenths etcetera. So when they need to say something in Dutch, they can’t. Whatever thoughts they have, they’re not so good at putting them into

words in Dutch. Which is one of the reasons why the Northerners don't say that much.”<sup>38</sup>

Spring 1925 - “the history of 1921 repeated itself” - Harmen van Houten said about the strike. However, this time the struggle didn't result from the initiative of a Revolutionary Committee of Peat Bog Workers (which Harmen van Houten was part of), but spontaneously arose everywhere out of unbearable social conditions, with more bitterness.

“Huge groups of strikers went from village to village. Even those who didn't participate were forced to stop their work. Acts of vandalism occurred as well. Every night there were fires set in the peat bogs. [...] People were furious at the unions, who didn't show up at the meetings, but who, far away from the agitation, held conferences with the bosses. [...] The anarchists were very divided concerning the usefulness of participating in the leadership [the committee of the strike]. Encouraging people to strike while there was nothing to gain? Doing nothing and accepting a thirty percent wage cut? [...] Obviously no one would go to work during the strike. [...] Meetings took place on a big piece of land where the A-channel meets the Scholtens channel. [...] Brommert was often there for the communists, Constandse for us. And in Friesland, in this period, Jo de Haas also agitated.”



Sources about the direct participation of the Mokers in this struggle are lacking, but one can be certain they shared the anarchists' point of view, as explained by Anton Constandse in *Alarm*:

“*What to do now?* The point of view of the anarchists was a known fact: they didn't accept responsibility for this struggle for better wages. Nevertheless, a lot had already been won: a spontaneous unity in the rebelliousness of the workers, a massive resistance, had shown itself. The bourgeoisie was seized by fear, and the strike had the character of a grand deed of resistance. [...] Outside of the unions and political parties a new spirit had taken over the proletarians, and had spread to over ten thousand people. [...] The unions had written: the peat bog workers have themselves to blame for a lot of their misery, because they are not organised. This insinuation is so harsh precisely because in a period of boom the wages of the *unorganised* peat bog workers also increased a lot, and the organised workers are currently also stuck in misery, also outside of the peat bog areas. The peat bog workers had done actions that were bigger, more powerful and showed more unity in an unorganised way, than what unions could ever have done. [...] Moreover, the anarchists had propagated that financial support for actions should not be organised. If an action cannot be won *because of its intensity and method*, it will definitely not be brought to a good end by trying to prolong it

with financial support. [...] If the sabotage, the solidarity actions, the spreading of conflicts do not lead to any result, a calm pace made possible by long-term financial support won't do that either. The workers outside of the peat bogs shouldn't think that they do their duty by handing over some coins to the peat bog workers, who in the meantime also don't want to become beggars. They only fulfil their task by participating in the struggle.”<sup>39</sup>

In the May 1<sup>st</sup> issue of *De Moker* itself, one can read the next article, written by Jacob Knap:

“Finally, we thought, it would come to a point where the workers wouldn't tolerate their constant misery any longer. And the news became more and more encouraging. Though very small, sympathy strikes started to take place. The conflict spread and soon, reaching the peat bogs in Drenthe, became a blazing flame. Although a strike for the improvement of living conditions, it was sympathetic because it broke out spontaneously, over the heads of the union leaders, and displayed very strong revolutionary tendencies. *Sabotage* was very present and we expected solidarity strikes throughout the country, yet this hope remained unfulfilled. It again became clear that the workers, educated in the union, do not possess any will to struggle. The NAS<sup>40</sup> couldn't come up with anything better than sending a telegram to the minister of home affairs, in

which a dialogue was requested. In this strike the SDAP and the NVV<sup>41</sup> played their usual role again, i.e. the *role of traitors*. The first thing *het Volk* [social-democratic newspaper] did was to point out to the police that the ‘well-known bomber’ Jo de Haas was amongst the strikers, and that he was largely the cause of the strike. [...] Quite soon he was arrested [...] However, in Drenthe our propagandists rose to the occasion. Constandse and Johan van den Eijnde [editor of *De Kreet der Jongeren*] were there, in the middle of the struggle. It was again *het Volk* that called them ‘anarchist demagogues’ and ‘irresponsible elements’. However, we are asking every thinking worker, what do you think about the so-called responsibility of the NVV secretary, who, at a meeting in Assen, had the nerve to say: “*We have been discussing our grievance with the authorities for three years already.*” At which point a tough guy interrupted: “And we have been starving for three years already.” What we also really ‘appreciated’, was the fact that exactly in the week when the strike broke out, the *Nederlands Syndicalistisch Vakverbond*<sup>42</sup> received the approval of the Royal House. [...] *For us this strike proves the power of direct action, and the workers should learn from it that this is the way that one can call revolutionary*”<sup>43</sup>

While the NVV tried to hinder the strike until its end, it was supported by the minority unions NSV and NAS. The latter persisted until the end in sending protest

telegrams to the Ministry of Home Affairs, in which a dialogue was requested in order to “show the minister how justified the violently repressed strike was.”<sup>44</sup> (As if these gentlemen weren’t aware of this!)

Furthermore, while the NAS did admit that the revolt was “direct and spontaneous”, they immediately stated after this that one “should not be satisfied with such spontaneous actions in the short term”, to subsequently logically encourage the workers to expand the ranks of their union: “Struggle with us as a revolutionary union and turn this movement, the NAS, into the organisation of all truly combative workers of Holland. This will mean the end of the reformist, worker-hostile leadership of the Dutch workers.”<sup>45</sup> In the same manner the NAS criticized the social-democratic press which continued to “moan about these ‘criminal’ striking saboteurs, who pull down telephone poles and burn heaps of turf.”<sup>46</sup> And even though in its protests against repression the NAS did not forget to mention the arrested anarchist activists, like Jo de Haas, these were the same people that were implicitly pointed out as the cause of the downfall of the strike: “First of all the organizational struggle was lacking, so we never got an accurate overview of the struggle. Second of all we didn’t have proper relief regulations, which could have eased the more harsh necessities. And on top of that the struggle was abused, by all kinds of insane theories of people who are used to talking through their hats, without speaking in a certain direction or about concrete propositions.”<sup>47</sup> One can imagine how such prose was welcomed by the Mokers with scornful laughter.

The attitude of the NSV considering the 'spontaneism' barely differed from that of the NAS. *De Syndicalist*, the NSV magazine, declared when referring to a wild cat strike in the metallurgical industry: "The point of view of the leaders of the centralised unions always has been, and still is: first the recovery of the industry and then.... the interests of the workers. Well, our point of view is this, and that is nothing new really, that we will always support the workers that revolt against those who exploit them, to the best of our abilities."<sup>48</sup> However, not without remarking: "Again, we would also like to explain our point of view towards wild cat strikes, for the hundredth time. Most importantly, we prefer dealing with a strike that is well organised in advance." When the peat bog strike broke out in the spring of 1925, the NSV kept its promise and started a campaign to support the strikers, whilst the NSV secretary went on a propaganda tour though the peat bogs to convince the workers to join his union, apparently without much success. On 11<sup>th</sup> April *De Syndicalist* reported:

"Against the workers stands a monstrous alliance of enemies. [...] Morally they have already won the struggle, no matter what and how it will unfold. Against their common enemy they have started a massive, real and common struggle, regardless of their religious and political differences. [...] They will learn from this struggle that solid and permanent organisation, based on the independent foundations of revolutionary syndicalism, is unconditionally and undeniably necessary."

In the following weeks *De Syndicalist* published more articles in the same vein. Despite their praise and material support for the strikers, the NSV as well as the NAS saw a shortcoming where *De Moker* and *Alarm* meant to see a revolutionary development. But also within the anarcho-syndicalist circles *De Syndicalist* was criticized for what it wrote about the strike:

“[...] I think that they, and I mainly mean Constandse and Jo de Haas [who where denigrated by *De Syndicalist*], have shown, and are still showing, to be true fighters for socialism. It becomes more and more obvious that when only the chiefs of a union are passionate about an action which only concerns *their* little sheep, and impede action when this isn't the case, more and more people will shout: down with the union movement.”<sup>49</sup>

The fact that so little was written about these matters in *De Moker* possibly has to do with the fact that in the following months some contradictions became apparent within the editorial committee of *De Moker*: some of the editors (Rinus van de Brink and Jacob Knap) had considered the differences between themselves and the more moderate groups of the VJV so insignificant that they, without taking the opinion of their comrades into consideration, decided to merge with the editorial committee of *De Kreet der Jongeren*, in order to publish the new magazine *De Branding* together – a random decision that was criticized heavily by the distributors and (ex-)editors, including Herman Schuurman.<sup>50</sup> Thus in the 19<sup>th</sup> issue of *De Moker*, dated 15<sup>th</sup> June 1925, the end of the publication was announced:

“Invited by the Northern groups of the VJV to hold a combined editorial staff meeting of *De Kreet der Jongeren* and *De Moker*, we have come together on 24<sup>th</sup> May in order to fulfil the wish to merge expressed by the North. This has taken place! Both editorial committees shared the opinion that for the purposes of both propaganda *and* for internal strengthening, *one* magazine would be more useful. The editorial committee and the administration will be formed by two ‘Kreet’ and two ‘Moker’ people. It is agreed [...] our new magazine will be called: *De Branding*. The first issue will be out on 15<sup>th</sup> June as a ‘War – Never again’ issue. [...] We have confidence that the readers of *De Moker* will welcome *De Branding* happily and count on everyone’s power and energy in order to make the magazine successful.”

But after many fights and debates, issue number 20 of *De Moker* was published on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1926 with a new anonymous editorial committee, who collectively took on the aggressive name “Teun de Sloper”<sup>51</sup>:

“Since the mobilisation brought the grey ‘unity’ into fashion, and the Russian red tsar the ‘unity’ front, we had to overcome an indigestion in our vital and social organs. All preservation machines, from the Christian, nicely Calvinistic midnight missionary to the anarchist organisation worshipper, were in high spirits because *De Moker* was ‘done for’. And then we met this old Satan again, who

provided us with a new comrade as editor for the resurrected *Moker* [...]: Teun the Demolisher. Traveller in dynamite and crowbars.”<sup>52</sup>

In the same issue, under the title “Personality and refusing military service”, a fierce critique appeared regarding so-called progress thanks to the rationalisation of industry:

“In the direction we are looking, modern capitalism moves itself towards exhausting the willpower of humankind. The so-called Taylor system, applied in America on a large scale by, amongst others, the noble humanitarian Ford, and in our country by Philips, Stork and others, wants to make the movements of the worker even more mechanical, to make them just as automatic as the machine he is operating, with the consequence that after working eight hours in this system one is more obtuse, exhausted and most of all without any willpower left, than after working ten hours in the old labour process. [...] “Tell me how you have fun and I will tell you who you are” one could say as a variant on a well-known proverb. And this becomes obvious if one sees the tasteless, banal and most of all senseless ways in which the worker of nowadays enjoys himself. All this is the miserable shadow that modern capitalism throws out in front of itself in its incessant development. [...] Refusing military service is the deed of the conscious personality against militarism, which only exists because



of the removal of this consciousness. But our whole society carries the same stamp as this militarism: denial and murder of personality. Which is why refusing military service has a general, social meaning, because it brings and represents the spirit of revolt that will encourage and lead the slaves of the XXth century into the struggle for a better society.”

# SYNDICALISM OR REVOLUTION

During the following months the anarcho-syndicalist tendency started to have influence in the NSV. *De Moker* seemed to find this development so important that for once it opened its columns for a propaganda article about syndicalism, “for the sake of free exchange of thoughts”. According to the author, a member of the Syndicalist Anarchist Youth<sup>53</sup> in Berlin, anarcho-syndicalism is more than just a union:

“Especially nowadays it is time to change our destructive character into a constructive one. We want the social revolution, that is our main goal. [...] The big merit of the syndicalists is that they show the practical way, not just of the destruction of the present – but also of the construction of a future society.”

Referring to the struggle for the eight-hour work day, in which he emphasized the importance of cultural development of the proletariat, he continued:

“We as well as anarcho syndicalists [have] the opinion that not everything about the daily struggle is good, which is something we always point out. However, we know that the ‘struggle for daily bread’ is an important exercise for the revolution. An emaciated, starved human being will never have much interest for big cultural things. But if one has the opinion that the worker becomes satisfied

through the eight-hour day and good wages, one unconsciously agrees with the Marxists' *Verelendungstheorie*<sup>54</sup>, which turned out to be an outrageous fiasco. For us the daily struggle is revolutionary gymnastics, through the everlasting struggle between the proletariat and the employers. [...] Until now all revolutions have failed, because after the destruction of the old society people did not have a foundation for the construction of a new one. [...] Because of its *industrial* and not professional federations on one side and its job markets on the other, [anarcho syndicalism] offers the certainty that production and consumption are taken care of in such a way that everybody's freedom is guaranteed. Corruption is made impossible by its system of councils from below to above. The new society without authority (anarchy) will depend on the functioning of this construction. These organisations have to form within the current society; the old society has to become pregnant with the new one."<sup>55</sup>

In the months following, *De Moker* reacted with a series of articles, spread out over several editions, under the title "The practice of socialism":<sup>56</sup>

"How to practically realise socialism? In *De Moker* 25 our comrade/opponent Eugen Betzer gives his answer to this questions of all questions in the best way he can. And never have I felt and understood more clearly how far apart people can stand from each other, people

who only seem to have an insignificant difference in opinion. [...] If we really want to make the seed of socialism grow and make its shell split open, we should firstly look in this place, there where this could be possible: in the continuously growing consciousness of humanity. But, (and how many of these syndicalists would understand this?) this spiritual growth can only be stimulated *with means that correspond to the highest goal*. Whoever thinks that he, with a penny more and an hour less, stimulates the social revolution, actually proves to not understand anything, but really anything at all, of the psychological factors that have to carry and push such a change of society. And whoever, like E.B., goes as far as calling this struggle for an improvement of life conditions within the framework of existing relations, who proceeds from a scary collective interest, 'revolutionary gymnastics', has crossed the border where the serious turns into the ridiculous. [...] Of course, an emaciated, starved human being is not 'any more' revolutionary than a well-fed one. We, young anarchists, are not supporters of the *Verelendungstheorie*. But a well-fed, self-satisfied (something different to self-conscious!), indolent working class which is content with a sufficient part of the winnings of the rulers, usually isn't very gifted with a particularly rebellious spirit. [...] In short: 'the spirit of socialism' is contradictory to 'the spirit of wage struggle'. The road to the revolution definitely does not pass through: wage struggle, eight-hour day, etcetera. [...] If one is

compelled by necessity to be in waged labour and is able to *demand* better working conditions through *direct action in the company itself* (factory councils!), every anti-syndicalist will agree with this when, as the Spartacus union writes in its program, one also recognizes the most important task as being to “reveal the deceitful character of such movements”. [...] We remember countless examples of the ‘practice of socialism’, such as, amongst others, the resolution of the IAA congress in ’25 about the practical improvements that were supposed to advance the revolutionary self-struggle, and the May 1<sup>st</sup> manifesto of the IAA, the Internationale of which the NSV is also a part, in which the six-hour day was ‘revolutionarily’ glorified; and when we have thought of all this, we know that syndicalism, just like all other union movements, has arrived at the stage of ‘revolutionary gymnastics’, a hopeless stage. [...] The ‘spirit of revolt’ is alien to it. [...] We point out the manifesto of the IAA, in which *this* side of wage-struggle, this particularly dangerous side, is being *ignored* completely, a manifesto in which the counter-revolutionary views that concerning the wage struggle are very apparent, are *not* mentioned at all. *And through this door left open so kindly, the truly reformist union-practice also enters the IAA again, and turns all the revolutionary phrases in the program into ‘grey theory’.* Despite all its clever theoreticians.”

These ‘clever theoreticians’, the anarcho-syndicalist intellectuals who took the initiative to found the IAA, were convinced that the liquidation of the revolution, by the Bolsheviks in Russia and the social-democrats in Germany, took place due to an inadequate economic organisation of the proletariat upon libertarian foundations. They experienced how powerless they stood against the manoeuvres of the political parties, who supposedly represented the proletarians; they witnessed how these parties were able to infiltrate, recuperate and liquidate the spontaneous organisation of the rebellious soldiers, workers and farmers in councils or soviets, in order to take over the power and re-establish the state. They came to the conclusion that “the next time” the workers should be better prepared for their revolutionary task – and that in order to achieve this they should organise themselves in revolutionary and libertarian unions. This new objective is summarized in the words of one of the anarchists who were banned from the Soviet Union and a founder of the IAA, Mark Mratchny:

“We have lost a lot of time by being occupied primarily with *organizing our own organisation*, while for the revolution the fundamental importance was to *organize the masses of the workers*.”<sup>57</sup>

Russians in exile such as Mratchny and especially Alexander Schapiro united with German anarcho-syndicalists, particularly Rudolf Rocker, people who had a long experience in the struggle and a high status in the

international libertarian movement, in order to collectively build up this 'economic organisation' of the proletariat:

“Revolutionary syndicalism is the movement of working people built upon the foundation of class struggle, and aims at uniting all intellectual and manual workers in economic organisations of struggle, in order to prepare and practically realise their liberation from the burden of wage slavery as well as from the repressive apparatus of the state. Its goal is the reorganisation of all social life, based on the foundations of free communism, through direct revolutionary action by the oppressed. Only the economic organisations of the proletariat in the city and the countryside are suitable for this task. Which is why revolutionary syndicalism speaks to the workers as being producers and creators of social wealth and not as members of modern political workers parties, which are not suitable to be the force behind economic reorganisation.”<sup>58</sup>

Founded with the explicit intention of countering the dominating influence of social-democratic reformism and the Bolshevik communism of the workers, the weakness of anarcho-syndicalism was that it started to compete with these organisations on their own terrain, as *De Moker* already pointed out ironically: “the six-hour work day ‘revolutionarily’ glorified”. This reformist aspect *par excellence* that the anarcho-syndicalist organisation hung on to was developed further

in the following years as the best method for resisting the disastrous consequences of rationalisation, mainly unemployment. In December 1919, during the founding congress of the Free Worker Union Germany (FAUD)<sup>59</sup>, that formed the basis of the initiative of the founding of the IAA, Rudolf Rocker stated, "We tactically distinguish ourselves from the political workers parties and the union centrals that are influenced by them, not at all because they already aim for improvements for the workers today, but because we choose a different means to achieve these improvements." What they wanted to do was to create some kind of self-managed framework structure within the companies, which would organise the class struggle through direct action (strikes, boycott, sabotage, etcetera) in order to eventually, by way of an "insurrectional general strike" and the abolition of the state, take the management of the economy into its own hands.

The Dutch part of the IAA, the NSV, initially took a 'neutral' position considering political parties. This changed when in November 1926 the Mixed Syndicalist Association (GSV)<sup>60</sup> was founded, which accommodated many intellectuals who influenced the union in the direction of anti-parliamentarian anarcho-syndicalism. One of these intellectuals was Arthur Lehning, who played an important role in the following decade as a theoretician and secretary of the IAA. In the speech that he held on this occasion he turned against the Moker group, and didn't hesitate to come up with false arguments to discredit those troublesome radicals:



“Every form of *self-organisation* – union, cooperation, association and so forth – has meaning for the self-liberation of the proletariat. Those who are convinced of this understand that this concept is difficult to unite with a thought that expresses itself in the propagandistic slogan ‘work is a crime’. When we not only want to fight capitalism, but also conquer it, then from what I stated before it logically follows that the workers cannot obtain the characteristics that are necessary for this by putting themselves *outside* of the company. [...] Propaganda promoting work in a good and responsible way, also during capitalism, can only improve the moral character, without which a socialist society is impossible. The proletariat can only educate itself through the practice of daily economic life, and only through this can it come to the insight that what is today a means of capitalist exploitation is at the same time that through which economic liberation can be carried out.”<sup>61</sup>

Contrary to constructive-reformist organisations such as unions and co-operatives, the Moker group (just like other groups which operated independently) would not be a form of self-organisation and would therefore not have any ‘meaning’ for “the self-liberation of the proletariat”, while they had been making themselves known for two years already with all kinds of actions and initiatives! Besides, by making work – and its defendants – the central theme of their attacks, the

Mokers didn't put themselves "outside of the company": they found "places for agitation everywhere..." They encouraged subversion and sabotage, not just of military means, which the anarcho-syndicalists also propagated, but against the whole production of... capital; they wanted the workers to occupy the workplace by themselves and for themselves. They discussed tactics to counter the politics of exclusion practiced by the industry bosses; they put these tactics into practice, and criticized the fact that the 'organised' proletariat took so long to understand that the capitalists had learned how to turn long-lasting strikes into something they could benefit from (like Thatcher sixty years later). They propagated the discontinuation of work, or, if this was not possible, using work to do as much damage to capitalism as possible. They advocated permanent agitation, encouraging rebelliousness, developing revolutionary situations. According to them this was their responsibility as revolutionary proletarians – that the workers would conquer the situation in which they are slaves to the wage. According to the anarcho-syndicalist conception of a "socialist society" the division of work and the structures that take care of it, by job, by company, by industry, would still exist after the abolition of wage labour; but it would all have to take place through "self-management" by the producers. In his turn referring to Bakunin, Arthur Lehning stated that the workers should "organise themselves in order to, through their federalist, industrial organisations, manage the means of production and therefore organise the whole of economic life on an industrial and federal basis". They would have to form these

organisations and educate themselves towards this goal already, and for this education they should use all the means that capitalism provides: the capitalist company, the ‘capitalist’ science, the ‘capitalist’ statistics. One could agree with him up to a certain point, such as when he wrote: “nothing is more pointless than completely rejecting all science, because this science would be bourgeois and its results are usually used for the benefit of the bourgeois.” But the science and knowledge that are necessary for the *overthrowing* of capitalism are not obtained by “working in a good and responsible way during capitalism”. Quite the contrary!

The definite, all-embracing critique of syndicalism by *De Moker* and *Alarm*, also in its most radical forms, touches an essential point concerning the way the workers movement has gone since then. While the anarcho-syndicalists wanted to revolutionize the union movement, the Mokers and their comrades revealed the ambiguity of this issue from the start. The history of anarcho-syndicalism in the thirties – the struggle between different tendencies, the schisms, the bureaucratizing as well as the fight against that phenomenon within the IAA and within several federations, which has as its apotheosis the total schism that took place during the Spanish civil war between a bureaucracy that collaborated with the republican state and a base that tried to bring the *comunismo libertario* into practice without it, despite it, and hindered by it – showed they were right.

The absolute, offensive radicalism of *De Moker*, which was its power, started to decrease once they started to

repeat themselves. After the show of strength against anarcho-syndicalism, *De Moker* seemed exhausted. At the same time repression increased and fascism started to spread in the Netherlands, as it did in the rest of Europe. *De Moker* from September 1927 is sombre: Sacco and Vanzetti, whose case had brought about a huge international campaign against 'class injustice', were executed despite everything; Piet Kooijman, one of the perpetrators of the 1921 assault, who at this point had already been in isolation for five years, was on hunger strike, without his comrades being able to get any information about his situation because all contact with the outside world was denied; house raids took place in Amsterdam at the houses of several Moker youths; Anton Constandse got a two month prison sentence "for writing agitating words directed at the marines, encouraging the workers to take a stand against the fascist Netherlands"; the Indonesian students who supported the revolt against the Dutch colonists were prosecuted. "Every worker knows (with the Italian events in mind) what will happen to him when he lets the situation come to the same point as in Italy." Because of the lack of revolutionary development, inside as well as outside *De Moker*, the group became more ideological, starting with issue 33, dated October 1927, when the subtitle of the magazine read *Magazine of young anarchists*, which was justified as follows in the next issue:

"At the last quarterly Moker meeting it was decided after a long debate that *De Moker*, which until now was called *Agitating magazine for young workers*, would be renamed

*Magazine of young anarchists.* [...] Probably a lot of people misinterpret the word agitation, which can often lead to a completely wrong judgement of our struggle and our means of struggle. For example, we don't mean agitation for a moment: bringing the workers to deeds which they cannot bear the responsibility of, or cannot see the consequences of, nevermind defend. [...] Some people do not agree with the composition of the current society, they even think it is criminal. [...] So in order to change it, they agitate their fellow human beings against this society, not to do miscalculated, reckless deeds, but to get a clear insight into these atrocities. So this agitation means: waking people up from their anaesthesia, from their 'just let it be' politics, and pointing out to them their responsibility concerning militarism, war and capitalism. Thus it means: pointing out to the workers the necessity of developing themselves in order to get a clearer view on things and, as a consequence of this, developing action which isn't based on hollow phrases but on scientifically studied foundations. Through this we will form personalities that, each and every one of them, know what they want and can personally defend their comings and goings, which will have as a consequence a very healthy movement. This, obviously, is something very different from a mass of people, agitated for a moment, which defers to its leaders and holds them responsible for its doings."<sup>62</sup>

This sounds very different from the offensive tone in which *De Moker* had previously appeared. The fire seemed to have burned out. The distribution of the magazine became problematic. It turned into a periodical. With the lack of revolution, a lot of energy was wasted on internal fights. On the streets people did not only fight against the cops now, but also more and more against fascist gangs. At the same time a critique developed within the group about a certain cult of violence that manifested within a few. The youth, who had set the adventure in motion, became older. The last issue of *De Moker*, number 37, appeared in the summer of 1928 and was filled mostly with articles that were copied from other magazines. In December of the same year, during a quarterly congress, *De Moker* was disbanded, "because the contradiction as it existed, between young and older anarchists, doesn't exist anymore."<sup>63</sup>

Many of the Moker group members stayed active, in one way or another, in the libertarian movement that found itself in a downward spiral, together with the crisis, poverty, the rise of fascism and a general turn to the right in society. Furthermore, the increasing violence from the state, which was especially noticeable in the Netherlands after the mutiny on the ship *De Zeven Provinciën*<sup>64</sup> in Dutch-Indonesian waters in February 1933, and the increasingly apparent threat of war, had as a result that *non-violence* gained ground in discussions concerning the 'defence of the revolution'. While in the circles around Bart de Ligt and Jo de Haas (who in the meantime had almost turned into a

fanatical pacifist) this non-violence was based on ethical grounds, the general thought, also of those who didn't see themselves as principally non-violent, was that "against the military violence of modern warfare, the working class has no other means than those of economic *defensibility*"<sup>65</sup> such as boycott, sabotage, industrial- and intellectual refusal of everything that has to do with military production. And when in 1936 the revolution broke out in Spain, the anti militarism that had been a binding factor for all those years paralysed the whole Dutch movement in a hopeless discussion about the legitimacy of armed struggle: intense polemics filled the anarchist and anti militarist magazines. While the 'rejecters of violence' criticized the Spanish anarchists solely because they took up arms, the 'accepters of violence', who did recognize the necessity of armed struggle, defended at the same time the state politics of the CNT/FAI bureaucracy as being inevitable and necessary<sup>66</sup>. But all of them basically limited themselves to propagating "humanitarian aid", from financial support to knitted socks. Some of the ex-Mokers went to Spain to be a part of the heroic, tragic struggle in the anarchist columns – but unfortunately about this nothing more is known beyond a few 'word of mouth' stories.

## WORK IS MORE AND MORE CRIMINAL

In July 1936, when Franco tried to carry out a coup d'état, a spontaneous revolt immediately broke out in Spain, where, since the proclamation of the republic in 1933, anarchism had assumed large proportions. All forces of the revolution and counter-revolution assembled there for a merciless fight on all fronts between supporters of Franco, Italian fascists, Nazis, Stalinists, social-democrats, revolutionary Marxists, and anarchists. Behind the front the revolutionary proletariat started the abolition of property, God and the State with a huge movement of collectivisations in cities and villages. Unfortunately, less than a year later, after a last revolutionary spark in May 1937 in Barcelona, this grand experiment was crushed by slander campaigns and ultimately killed by the death squad of the Stalinists who, under the false veil of supporting the republic in its struggle against fascism and because of the passive complicity of the social-democrats and anarcho-syndicalist bureaucrats, had appropriated control over the government, the police and the 're-militarized' republican army. This way the old world finally got rid of its trouble-makers, and the rebellious generation that had fought in Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Italy, Hungary and elsewhere since 1917 was pushed into oblivion because of the unanimous silence by the bourgeois media and by the totalitarian organs of propaganda. The experiences of the revolution were hidden or falsified and its supporters were slandered, hunted down and



executed. The space for any kind of protest was taken away from the proletariat. As a result, the degree of exploitation could also be taken a step further, in the direction of pure slavery and extermination, with forced labour in the concentration camps of the Nazis and the Stalinists as well as in the colonial empires of the more 'civilised democracies'. After the nazification of all of Europe in the Second World War and after the military defeat of fascism, under the shared supervision of the new managers of the rationalisation of the economy on one side and the union bureaucracies for the necessary work discipline on the other, the reconstruction was begun, partly thanks to the importation of labour forces from the (ex)colonies. The still-valid word of order 'Work-Family-Nation' was tempered with the false promise that the 'welfare state' with its 'leisure civilisation' was soon to come, and that this would certainly happen because of the fast increase in productivity and the equal progression of automatisisation. The countless "new ways of poisoning [that] are necessary for taking away the soul of the working class", as the Mokers said when they were first confronted with this *society of the spectacle*, served to sing the masses to sleep despite the massacres that took place everywhere but were not able to completely suffocate the urge for freedom, neither in the colonies nor in the industrialized countries. The two rival powers in the cold war both needed to use all their force in order to ensure that not one single revolt, wherever, would go as far as to conquer alienation from the state, not within their borders, nor those of the so-called enemy, and neither in the 'decolonised' colonies which had to be transformed into a 'third

world' to be at their disposal. Nevertheless it could not be prevented that from the underground of society, in a gulf of revolt and realisation, all the worn-out and compromised ideologies were rejected and all ruling norms and values were thrown away, climaxing in the revolt of May '68 in France. The various oil-, economic and political crises; the fusion between the two systems of exploitation, who divided the world between them at the end of the Second World War, in the synthesis of the *integrated spectacle* which without hesitation made a new character appear on the scene as the new indispensable Enemy, the flesh and blood successor from Orwell's 1984, Goldstein-Bin Laden; all the wars that were fought since then; the new terrorist horrors; the disasters, Becquerel overdoses, stress and countless other forms of pollution; the growth of precariousness and the phantom of poverty and hunger for those who are excluded from comfort and the fake gold that is 'available' on the market; the return of forced labour and the various "reintegration" programs; and last but not least, all the expensive campaigns to promote all of the above, all this has turned out to be insufficient to rehabilitate labour in the eyes of the proletarians.

With the exception of a minority of privileged people and careerists, workers, generally speaking, don't like their job, or even hate it. It's a very simple truth, a public secret which people don't speak about, except in the intimacy of their close circle of friends. Young and old people keep finding ways of escaping labour, often in an individual manner, or otherwise in collectives that limit themselves to defending the unemployed and/or

artists with demands for a basic income...which actually means that while awaiting the spontaneous collapse of the system of exploitation they try to make the best deal possible with this same system. This is why the debates about work are so often dominated by metaphysical speeches about how outdated the concept is by individuals who, nestled in the ethereal spheres of “grey theory” as the Mokers put it, ignore the critique of action regarding labour and this whole cursed system that derives its lifeblood from the slavery of the masses. Nevertheless, everyone knows that every single day countless workers steal, sabotage, simulate, cause damage in all kinds of ways to their bosses and to the company that chains them – and nowadays with many more reasons than at the time of the Mokers, considering the much greater quantities of trash, imitations, pollution, poison, weapons and lies that are now produced; commodities that only serve the survival of capitalism. Such tactics, however, are rarely brought into practice or revealed in a collective manner, and even less often are they openly directed against the system of exploitation as such. Nevertheless, these days no one should still believe that he or she can escape the terrible conclusion of *Work is a crime*:

“If we don’t work towards the destruction of capitalism, we are working towards the destruction of humanity”

These are the circumstances in which the exploiters and their servants are desperately trying to maintain the system that – still – feeds them with blood, sweat

and tears. Which is why all ‘authorities’, big and small, sing in chorus the praises of work, such that it is being praised on all sides as the magic remedy that solves all problems; which is why the political parties compete, whether they are ‘ready to govern’ or not, over who will get the most unemployed back to work; which is why the unions don’t demand ‘the right to work’ any longer, but henceforth advocate ‘the duty to work’. In Amsterdam, in former times a relatively free city, the director of the Work and Income Service (DWI)<sup>67</sup> could, barely over a year after its creation and after having increased the control measures on ‘dole fraud’ and putting pressure on those allegedly ‘entitled to benefits’, boast of his success: “The general point of view nowadays is that those who can work, *should* work. Which is very different from twenty years ago, when people considered it normal that one would choose the dole, as if it was a basic income.” However, that little neo-Bonaparte, who was wielding the sceptre over the remains of the French empire, out-shined his rivals when he started his election campaign with the elegance reminiscent of the main gates to a concentration camp, with the words: “*Le travail, c’est la liberté.*”<sup>68</sup>

It is the proletarians of today who have to knock over this apocalyptic order of things, by joining the struggle of the most brave comrades among us. To give a few of the most noteworthy examples:

‘The comrades who responded when a revolt broke out in the spring of 2001 in Kabylia (North Algeria), which within no time threw the whole region into

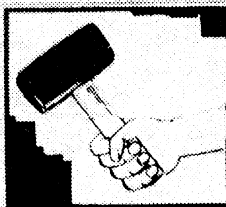
commotion. The cause of the revolt was yet another mistake by the cops, fatally shooting a boy. These comrades stormed police stations and chased out the cops. Official buildings were plundered systematically and put on fire; they organised themselves in base-democracy meetings, where every political party was banned in advance, and their actions were coordinated by a system of representatives for whom it was forbidden to have any contact with representatives of power, under the penalty of exclusion.

The comrades who, when a revolt broke out in Argentina in December 2001, really wanted “que se vayan todos” and chased away two presidents in a row, plus a large number of important owners, and who were united in factory and neighbourhood meetings in order to start reorganising economic and social life.

The comrades who, in the autumn of 2005 in the French *banlieus*, attacked the structures of the neo-police state by setting fire to cop stations, justice buildings, city halls and employment offices amongst other things, as well as to the symbols of what is left of the ‘happiness’ which is permitted under the spectacle of capitalism: the car, McDonald’s, the supermarket, the gym etcetera; who organised themselves spontaneously with the help of instant messaging and text messages, without whatever kind of bosses, ideologies, gurus or other kinds of impostors. This last big revolt in Europe might not have succeeded in overstepping the negative work of the revolt, but through this it also made any kind of recuperation impossible. “This city guerilla,

unexpected, elusive, characterizing itself by the absence of leaders [...] The fact that all those in power were scared shitless has a reason, because *this* was only a foretaste of what will happen when the whole planet starts to dance, when all the poor will join in.”<sup>69</sup>

The revolutions of the twentieth century did not fail due to of a lack of fundamentals on which to build a new society after the old society is destroyed. On the contrary, they all show that there where power disappears, the masses spontaneously start to organize themselves in democratic structures and begin to invent a new social life. The misfortune is that up until now not a single revolution has managed to sufficiently undermine the fundamentals of the old society, an undermining which starts when the proletarians begin to distrust all ‘experts’ and treat everyone who gets the idea of wanting to represent them or to negotiate in their name as an enemy, in the meantime keeping in mind that “in a unified world every local revolt, no matter how strong and profound, has not got a future if it does not manage to *unite itself with the world*.”<sup>70</sup>



# DE MOKER

OPRUIEND BLAD VOOR  
JONGE ARBEIDERS



DE MAN MET DE TRUFFEL TOT DE MAN MET DE MOKER: „ZEG  
KAMERAAD, MAAK WAT VOORT, ZODAT M'N TIJD OOK GAUW KOMT”

## EPILOGUE

The original version of this book was written in 2007, and is therefore not completely up to date. “The last big revolt in Europe” (p.68) for example, would now not bring to mind the riots in the *banlieus*, but rather the revolts in Greece. “A few of the most noteworthy examples” (p.67) could be extended by several pages, considering what has been happening in North Africa and the Middle East over the past few years. It is not important whether people “spontaneously start to organise themselves in democratic structures”, or “start reorganising economic and social life”; what matters is the realisation that a break with normality is possible, that the structures and representatives of power are everywhere and can always be attacked. That said, there are rebels everywhere, every day there are people who decide to turn their desire for something different into something tangible, that might not set the world on fire entirely, but, as someone once said, *from a little spark might burst a flame*.



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**Klaas Blauw** (1901-1924) was born in Wijntjetjerp, Friesland, to a poor family of Domela Nieuwenhuis supporters, like many in this area were. Klaas was a smart, studious boy who had the privilege of continuing his studies to become a teacher. However, quite quickly he realised that the existing social system was so disgusting that he didn't want to take on the responsibility of forcing its dominant "norms and values" upon the children of the workers. He became a "teacher that ran away" as he said himself. He was also said to have been a "passionate vagabond". Naturally, he refused military service and spent quite some months in prison for this. His parental house (meanwhile in Haarlem) became one of the meeting places of the Mokers, where the comrades were always welcome. In the spring of 1923 he and another VJV member, Henk Eikeboom, went to Berlin, to the International Youth Conference and the Congress of German Anarchists, where he spent another six weeks in prison because at a police check-point it turned out he didn't have valid papers with him. To raise some money to earn a living he worked as an upholsterer. He also traveled within the Netherlands to make propaganda and deliver lectures everywhere. In August 1924, on his way to Wijntjetjerp where he was supposed to give a speech during a meeting of the local department of the IAMV, he visited a friends' house to meet some other comrades, one of them being Herman Schuurman. There he took out his new Browning to show to his comrades, since weapons weren't something very common within these circles. The weapon

accidentally went off and hit young Klaas Blauw with a deadly shot. He was loved everywhere and his comrades collected money for years and years in order to put a monument upon his grave, in Wijntjetjerp – a relief, hacked out in stone, of a worker who breaks his chains, with his face to the sun, that predicts a better future.

**Jacob Knap** (1903-1999) came from an anarchist worker's family in Krommenie. After highschool he had periods of unemployment and periods in which he worked office jobs. He translated the anti-war poetry of Oskar Kanehl, of which some poems were printed in *De Moker*. In the thirties he became active in the Free-thinkers Movement; his radio lectures for the *Vrijdenkers Radio Omroep* (VRO, Free Thinkers Broadcast) including *Jeugd en Vrije Gedachte* (Youth and Free Thought), prohibited by the radio controlling commission), *Jeugd en Fascisme* (Youth and Fascism) and *Francisco Ferrer, zijn leven, zijn werken* (Francisco Ferrer, his life, his works), written under the pseudonym Jacq Erka, were published as a brochure. From 1934 until 1966 he ran a bookshop in Betondorp, Amsterdam.

As explained in the text of this book, **Herman Schuurman** (1897-1991) left the movement in 1927. The following biographical notes consider his life after he left *De Moker*.

Herman Schuurman started focusing on the so-called 'youth hostels', a phenomenon that he knew from Germany, and which had started to spread in the

Netherlands as well at that time. His goal was to influence these in an anti-authoritarian way, even though he was under no illusions about the possible revolutionary meaning of this movement that he called 'diluted'. It is not clear for how long he continued doing this. He married Emily van Bilderbeek, who was involved with the group around *Alarm*; she had learned bobbining as well as, just like Herman, graphic techniques, skills that they used during the war and the crisis period taking on all kinds of assignments in order to survive. During the Second World War they and their family lived in the house of the Kohnstamm family in Ermelo, who had to go into hiding in a different place. From there they put their efforts into saving the Jews from the Nazis. After the war Emily, and at a later stage Herman as well, started teaching at the Kees-Boeke school in Bilthoven, where they also sent their children to learn. Nevertheless, this system also didn't escape the criticism of his father, according to Otto Schuurman.

Considering Herman Schuurman's translations from German, he probably picked up the German language during his rambles in Germany, which from the age of fifteen he often visited when he ran away from home due to fights with his father (the owner of a bar...). There he also had contact with the *Vagabunden* movement, with which he sympathised but apparently did not play an active role in. At a certain moment he was also arrested for refusing military service, and was convicted with a heavy sentence; however, it is not clear when exactly this happened (statement from his son, Otto Schuurman).

**Johan de Haas** (1897-1945) was born as the son of traveling actors. When he was 15 years old he was 'sold' to the marines, which he deserted in 1917. After spending ten months in jail he rejoined the SAJO and founded *De opstandeling, orgaan der Federatie van Sociaal-Anarchistische Jongeren* (The rebel, organ of the Federation of Social-Anarchist youth). He collaborated with *Alarm* as well as *De Moker*, and numerous other magazines. He was acquitted at higher appeal of complicity in an attack in November 1921. He was very active and a good speaker, and did many propaganda tours by bicycle through the Netherlands. In the thirties he converted to religious anarchism. At the end of the Second World War he was tried by the nazis for acts of resistance.

In September 1926 Jo de Haas, together with Jacob Knap, left *De Moker* and joined the *Verbond van Opstandige Jeugd* (VOJ, Association of Rebellious Youth), that gathered around *De Branding*, which separated itself from the VJV in February of the same year, in order to make the distinction between itself and the radical, outspoken anarchists around *de Moker* more clear.

**Anton Constandse** (1899-1985) was a merchant's son. He was taken out of school when he was five years old. Later he joined the anti-alcohol youth (JGOB), and became a socialist. In 1919 he joined the International Anti-Militarist Association, and after that the SAJO where he praised the occupation of factories and the forming of workers councils. Before he founded *Alarm* in 1922 he had already written articles for several

anti-militarist and libertarian magazines. He collaborated in several publications while he traveled through the country to hold propaganda speeches or organise general cultural activities. He was prohibited from practicing his job as a teacher due to his criminal record. In the thirties, confronted with the rise of fascism and consequently the downfall of the Spanish revolution, where he saw anarchists collaborating with the power of the State (something that he thought was inevitable), he started to doubt the efficiency of anarchist methods. He started studying social psychology and introduced the theories of Wilhem Reich in the Netherlands. Together with a group of intellectuals he was captured by the nazis and was locked up for the most part of the war. After his release he became an essayist and a journalist, with all the illusions and compliance towards the existent order. He wrote over a hundred articles and dozens of brochures and books. About his revolutionary past he once said: "I have said goodbye to anarchism in the way that one says goodbye to a dear friend that disappears".

## ENDNOTES

- 1) A *moker*, also called *vuistje* (little fist), is a club hammer.
- 2) *Het recht op luiheid*, the first Dutch translation of Paul Lafargue's pamphlet *Le Droit a Paresse* from 1880, appeared in 1916 translated by J. de Wachter.
- 3) Refers to the famous last sentence of "The Reaction in Germany" by Bakunin: "*Die Lust der Zerstörung ist zugleich eine schaffende Lust!*" which means: "The passion of destruction is at the same time a creating passion!"
- 4) The word *organs* is used here to describe magazines, papers of propaganda et etcetera. [TN]
- 5) J. Verhave, "Het moet!" (It must be!), *De Moker*, no. 4, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1924
- 6) Verbal statement, quoted in *Die Moker en Alarm groepen bestonden niet om te bestaan als groep: sociaal anarchistiese jeugdbeweging in Nederland 1918-1928* (Those Moker and Alarm groups didn't exist in order to exist as groups: social anarchist youth movement in the Netherlands 1918-1924), by Fike van der Burght. p. 49
- 7) A.J J(ansma), "Luiheid en kapitalisme" (Laziness and capitalism), *Alarm*. Anarchist monthly, no. 6, 1922.
- 8) Fike van der Burght, *ibid.* p. 41
- 9) Announcement of the appearing of *De Moker*, by Jo de Haas, in *Alarm*, January 1924
- 10) Internationale Antimilitaristische Vereniging [TN]

11) In 1799 the Dutch state inherited the 'right to pillage' in the Indonesian group of isles, that until then solely belonged to the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC, United East-Indian Company). A century later (in the time of 'imperialism') the Dutch state felt it necessary to defend its monopoly against the bold greediness of its competitors. Therefore it started a sinister pacification of the 'emerald belt', in order to establish its power there permanently and cash in on it more. Over the course of several military campaigns, during which the grim resistance of the indigenous people was answered with the most extreme cruelties, the Dutch army stopped destroying the feudal relations of the still powerful principalities and empires whose total submission could not be guaranteed. Here it introduced modern capitalism and started with industrial exploitation. The petrol fields, mines and gigantic plantations demanded a concentration of the proletariat, deported from across the Indonesian isles, Asian rural areas and even Africa. The regular disclosures of cruelties committed by the army and colonists did indeed shock Dutch public opinion, and sometimes led to disagreements in the parliament. But only the anarchists, and later the trotskyist communists of Sneevliet (who founded the *Partai Komuni Indonesia* in 1914) and the council communists, completely defended the Indonesian resistance. The anti-militarists particularly resisted the "sending of Dutch youth in order to secure the exorbitant profit of the bourgeoisie in the East". Those who grouped around *Alarm* and *De Moker* clarified their point of view by declaring that they wanted that "the indigenous population would be freed from capitalism and therefore freed from the Netherlands". They also confirmed that the best support to the Indonesians in their struggle for emancipation, and also the best means in order that the nationalist matter would be defeated by the matter of the international proletariat, would be, in the metropole itself, to undermine the source of the imperialism: capitalism.

12) The Netherlands was officially 'neutral' during the First World war, and remained so until its invasion by Germany in May 1940

13) Sociaal-Anarchistische Jeugdorganisaties [TN]

14) According to Anton Constandse, co-founder and editor of *Alarm*, a "connection developed between the council communists who had left the Communist Party (like Leen van der Linde, Piet Kooijman, Wim Hoenders) and anarchist groups like the Alarmists, who took over some radical-marxist theories in the economic field, that also used to be inherent to syndicalists like Georges Sorel. Sorel also, in the period that he could be seen as an anarcho-syndicalist, noted in their movement the expression of a straightforward class struggle, first of all to be practised in the companies. The idea of occupying the companies was a form of 'dictatorship of the proletariat', instead of a 'dictatorship of the party'. The current of the anarchist Alarmists has stayed characterized by its ties with the council communists." (*De Alarmisten, 1918-1933, Amsterdam 1975, pp. 16-17*)

15) Jongelieden Geheelonthoudersbond [TN]

16) Vrije Jeugd Verbond [TN]

17) Herman J. Schuurman, *De Moord*, [1921]. Reprinted in the book *Herman Schuurman (1897-1991)*, that was published on account of his death on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1991.

18) Quote from Leen van der Linde in P.A. Kooijman, *Neem en eet. Bomaanslag en opruiing als sociale filosofie* (Take and eat. Bomb attack and agitation as social philosophy) pp. 18-19. Moreover, the perpetrators of the attack justified themselves on paper in P.A. Kooijman, L. v.d. Linde, Jo de Haas, *De revolutionaire daad, Uitgave: Agitatie-Commissie: Weg met de Partijen, de Vakorganisaties en de Bonzen*, 1922 (The revolutionary deed, Edition: Agitation-Committee: Down



with the Parties, the Unions and the Party bosses, 1922). At a later stage Anton Constandse stated that two of the perpetrators came from a dissident marxist group: “Odd was then already the incidental collaboration between some social-anarchists and Marxists who had accepted the principles of council communism. They mostly found each other in the defence of the uprising in Cronstadt, in 1921” (Dr. A.L. Constandse, *Anarchisme van de daad van 1848 tot heden* (Anarchism of the Deed from 1848 until now), The Hague, 1970, p. 178) In their attempt to push things forward within the movement, those same people also considered kidnapping the mayor of Amsterdam and not giving him any food until Groenendaal would be released. They also had plans for committing an attack on the owner of a dock who was responsible for a lock-out of the metal workers, but this too could not be carried out. However, all of this shows that their main motive wasn’t really their solidarity with Groenendaal or anti-militarism in itself, but more the “passion of destruction” against the whole capitalist system.

19) This manifesto is repeated in every issue of *De Moker*. The more moderate members of the VJV gathered around *De Kreet der Jongeren* (Shout of the Youth) and later *De Branding* (the Breakers). An ‘internal’ bulletin of the VJV, *De Pook* (the Poker), covered both tendencies.

20) “Bolshevistisch bedrog” (Bolshevist deception), *De Moker*, no. 11, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1924

21) See the illustration for a reproduction of the cover of *De Moker*, no. 12, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1924

22) Troelstra was a social-democrat leader, SDAP stands for *Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij* (Social Democrat Worker’s Party) [TN]

23) There were conflicts, fights between people, power games, rumours, etc., but it's about petty history, which is difficult to judge considering the lack of documents, and isn't very interesting anyway.

24) *De Moker*, no. 30, May 1927. This report also shows that there were some frictions, in which conflicts between people and contradictions between the more moderate groups of the VJV and the Mokers seem to have been mixed in with each other.

25) Herman S[chuurman], "De bloedhonden zijn los" (The bloodhounds are loose), *De Moker*, no. 12, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1924

26) Rinus van de Brink, "Niet in de kazerne – Niet in de gevangenis" (Not in the barracks – Not in prison) *De Moker*, no. 11, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1924. He got a two month prison sentence, as editor of *De Moker*, for this article.

27) "Teun de Sloper, reiziger in dynamiet en breekijzers." [TN]

28) Dutch gin [TN]

29) Gerrit, "Jeugd en alcohol zijn vijanden" (Youth and alcohol are enemies), *De Moker*, no. 8, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1924.

30) Oproerling, "'Misdaad' als beginsel" (Rebel, "'Crime' as a principle"), *De Moker*, no. 9, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1924.

31) Quoted in Fike van der Burght, *ibid.* pp. 29-30. She notes that it is "difficult to verify to what extent people really sabotaged the companies, factories and workplaces. This people didn't write about, *that* was too dangerous." Almost all the deeds of sabotage were directed against military objects.

32) Muiden, Spaarndam, Overveen and Santpoort are all places more or less close to Amsterdam. [TN]

33) Herman S[chuurman], “Wie zijn de brandstichters?” (Who are the arsonists?), *De Moker*, no. 15, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1925.

34) Jac. Knap, “School- en Partijgif” (School- and Partypoisson), *De Moker*, no.5, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1924.

35) “Daad-loos” (Without a deed), *De Moker*, no.4, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1924.

36) Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe are the three most northern provinces of the Netherlands. [TN]

37) Barely two years later the workers from Twente were struck by the same fate and lost a long and hard strike. Woe the indecisive!

This quote as well as those on the next pages are taken from the book of Harmen van Houten, *Anarchisme in Drenthe. Levensherinneringen van een veenarbeider* (Anarchism in Drenthe. Life memoirs of a peat bog worker), Baarn, 1985. It's a unique testimony by one of the participants in this struggle. Harmen van Houten was active in the libertarian movement during all of his life.

38) Quoted by Arie Hazekamp in his article “De geschiedenis van de Pinksterlanddagen” (The history of the Pinksterlanddagen). Even though in his article Hazenkamp emphasizes the cultural contradictions such as this one and the personal fights within the libertarian youth movement, one can feel from this the more real contradiction between the radicals and the moderates, between those who impatiently want to break the whole system down into pieces and those who, introvertly, are more directed towards their self-development and sit on the fence.

39) “De strijd in de Venen” (The struggle in the peat bogs), Alarm, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1925.

40) The *Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat* (National Worker’s Secretary) was a union founded by Christiaan Cornelissen and Domela Nieuwenhuis in 1893. At the time of this strike the NAS, under the leadership of Henk Sneevliet, was still connected to the *Rode Vakbonds Internationale* (RVI, Red Unions International), that was controlled by Moscow. Its organ, *De Arbeid. Revolutionair weekblad van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat* (Labour. Revolutionary weekly of the NAS) was filled with texts that showed its fondness towards the government of commissioners of the people in Russia. The schism with the Bolsheviks only took place in 1927.

41) The *Nederlandse Vakbonds Vereniging* (Dutch Trade-Union Association), the yellow union, founded in 1906 as a consequence of the huge railway strike in 1903, the Dutch version of the “general strike” that in the beginning of the twentieth century started to appear in the industrial world. In 1982 the NVV fused with the *Nederlands Katholiek Vakverbond* (NKV, Dutch Catholic Trade-Union) which resulted in today’s *Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging* (FNV, Dutch Trade-Union Federation).

42) Dutch Syndicalist Trade-Union, NSV, founded in 1923, when a very small majority of the NAS preferred to join the RVI, by the minority that joined the International Worker’s Association (IAA, *Internationale Arbeiders Associatie*). The IAA was founded in Berlin in 1922, as a reaction towards the ‘red’ as well as the ‘yellow’ syndicalism. Nevertheless the NSV only slowly developed itself towards anarcho-syndicalism, and in 1925 the majority of the unions that were members of the NSV were still not against the state.

43) Jac. K[nap], “De stakingen in het Noorden” (The strikes in the North), *De Moker*, no.18, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1925.

44) *De Arbeid*, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1925

45) *De Arbeid*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1925

46) *De Arbeid*, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1925.

47) *De Arbeid*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1925.

48) *De Syndicalist*, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1925

49) W.S. Stam, “Na de stakingen in de Venen” (After the strikes in the Peat bogs), *De Syndicalist*, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1925

50) Moreover, in the 15<sup>th</sup> August issue of *Alarm* it is mentioned that there will be juridical prosecutions against Herman Schuurman and Jo de Haas: “Jo de Haas has been sentenced to three months in prison, as has Job v.d Burg in Leeuwarden, and a process has been started against Herman Schuurman, who was kept on remand. The first is sentenced for writing an agitating article, the second because of treason, and Herman Schuurman is prosecuted after the fight in Bilthoven, where the insane police beasts furiously pitched into everyone, and for which Herman is being accused of: arson (setting a carton ballot box on fire), resistance against the cops and agitation.

51) In the internal organ of the VJV that covered both tendencies, *De Pook*, this conflict is briefly mentioned.

52) Appeared in the column “Springstof” (Dynamite) and signed with “Oproerling” (Rebel)

53) Syndikalistisch Anarchistische Jugend [TN]

54) The *Verelendungstheorie* (Theory of Pauperization) is a term that came into existence – and that became a topic of heavy debates – in the German social-democracy of the Second Internationale, and is based on a very deterministic interpretation of the “general law of capitalist accumulation” as Marx describes it in *Capital* (Section 7, chapter XXIII), in which he, among other things, writes: “Within the capitalist system all methods to increase the social production force of labour are at the expense of the individual worker; all means for development of production turn into means for ruling and exploiting the producers [...] All methods for production of plus-value are at the same time methods to form capital, and every increase in the forming of capital vice versa turns into a means for the development of these methods. [...] The accumulation of wealth on the one side thus means at the same time an accumulation of misery, labour torture, slavery, ignorance, brutalization, and moral decline on the other, in other words, on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.” According to the interpretation of the *Verelendungstheorie*, this would mean that the development of capitalism puts the workers in an increasingly deeper misery, and that the gap between the two classes grows increasingly wider; the inner contradictions of capitalism, the inner concurrence and successive crises, should eventually lead to its collapse and hence, as it were, ‘legitimately’ lead to socialism. This indeed untenable simplification of Marx’ theory was subsequently used by the reformist social-democrats in order to call those, who claimed that the capitalist system can not be reformed in the sense of a true improvement of the situation of the ‘working class’, supporters of the *Verelendungstheorie* – that logically, in its most extreme form, had to result in a form of cynicism à la Netsjaev in his *Revolutionary Catechism*: “The Brotherhood shall, with all its forces and all the means it has, contribute to the development and expansion of the torments which exhaust the patience of the people and will incite a general revolt.”

55) Eugen Betzer, "Syndicalisme en anarchisme" (Syndicalism and anarchism), *De Moker*, no.25, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1926. Betzer was at the anti-capitalist Whitsun mobilisation in 1924, where he called for unity of all anarchists.

56) Johnny Homan, "De praktijk van 't socialisme", (The practice of socialism) *De Moker*, no.27, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1926; no.29, March 1927; no.31, July 1927.

57) Quoted in Arthur Lehning, *La Naissance de l'Association Internationale des Travailleurs de Berlin. Du syndicalisme révolutionnaire à l'anarcho-syndicalisme* (The birth of the International Worker's Association of Berlin. From revolutionary syndicalism to anarcho-syndicalism)

58) First paragraph of the *Beginselverklaring van de Internationale Arbeiders Associatie* (Manifesto of the International Worker's Association), that was accepted at the founding congress of the IAA (Berlin, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1922 - 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1923)

59) Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands [TN]

60) Gemengd Syndicalistische Vereniging [TN]

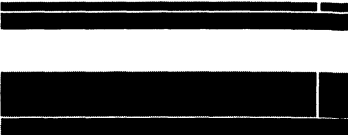
61) Arthur Müller Lehning, *Anarcho-syndicalisme. Rede uitgesproken op 17 November 1926 op de stichtingsvergadering der "Gemengde Syndicalistische Vereniging"* (Anarcho syndicalism. Speech at the founding meeting of the "Mixed Syndicalist Association" on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1926) published as a brochure in 1927. A text that has been reprinted and quoted several times in debates about organisation.

62) "Een verandering" (A change), *De Moker*, no.24, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1927.

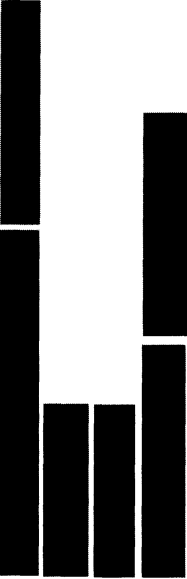
- 63) Quoted in Fike van der Burght, *ibid.* p.50
- 64) The Seven Provinces [TN]
- 65) A. Müller Lehning and A. de Jong, *Over de verdediging van de revolutie* (About the defence of the revolution), 1931
- 66) Even though Albert de Jong, editor of *De Syndicalist*, as more or less the only one, would give a more critical view on the politics of the CNT/FAI and write a very critical commentary in a series of articles in 1939 under the title “Het Spaanse probleem” (The Spanish problem).
- 67) Dienst Werk en Inkomen [TN]
- 68) Formulation that brings about grim memories of the sinister “Arbeit macht frei” in Auschwitz, as well as of the entrance gates of the stalinist camps with “the inevitable official inscription: ‘Labour is about honour, about glory, about courage and heroism’” (from: Varlam Sjalamov, *Kolyma Tales*)
- 69) Quote from the text *Les banlieus en feu. Le spectacle au milieu* (The suburbs on fire. The spectacle up in flames)
- 70) See the last chapter, “*La lutte des classes au Xxe siècle*” (The class struggle in the twenty-first century)







“That is why we will consciously sabotage every capitalist enterprise, we will be a burden to each and every boss. Where we, rebellious youth, have to work, materials, machines and products have to be made unusable. Again and again the gears will jump out of the wheels, the pieces will fly from knives and chisels, the tools most necessary will be nowhere to find - we will tell each other recipes and means.



We do not want to be destroyed by capitalism, so capitalism will have to be destroyed by us.”

